

State of Connecticut

GENERAL ASSEMBLY



PERMANENT COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

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**Testimony before the Education Committee
By Leslie J. Gabel-Brett, Ph.D. Executive Director
The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
Friday, March 4, 2005**

Re:

**H.B. 6680, An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations
Concerning Education**

Good morning Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of the committee. My name is Leslie Gabel-Brett and I am the Executive Director of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. Thank you for this opportunity to testify regarding the Governor's Budget Recommendations Concerning Education.

PCSW has recently become involved in this issue from the perspective of achieving pay equity for female-dominated professions such as early care and education. As you know, professionals in the field of early care and education perform the most important work – caring for and beginning the education of our youngest children – and yet are paid very low wages, and rarely receive benefits. We think this is unfair to the workers, and also diminishes the quality of care and education provided to children.

We also focus on the issue of early care and education from the perspective of working parents who need a high quality, safe and affordable program for their young children so that they can go to work. That is why we are very strong supporters of restoring full funding for the Care4Kids program and allowing low-income working parents full access to the assistance it provides.

With respect to H.B. 6680, An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations Concerning Education, therefore, we support the intent of Section 4, which authorizes the State Department of Education to award grants for scholarships to existing employees of school readiness programs for the purpose of earning associate degrees in child development. The Governor has proposed appropriating \$1 million new dollars per year for this purpose, and we support this appropriation.

We respectfully, recommend, however, that employees in other programs, including state-funded childcare centers, also be eligible for these scholarships. We also recommend that the State Department of Education be required to coordinate this program with Connecticut Charts-a-Course, our existing program for professional development for early care and education workers, and with the efforts of the Career Ladders Advisory Committee within the Office of Workforce Competitiveness.

This last recommendation is particularly important because *we must tie further education and credentialing of professionals with increased wages and benefits*. It is unfair and unrealistic to ask working professionals to dedicate the time and effort required to obtain an Associates Degree without any expectation that their compensation will reflect their increased qualifications. Moreover, experience has shown that increasing the qualifications *and* the compensation for early care and education professionals reduces the otherwise high turnover rate in this field, resulting in better outcomes for children. This is a "win-win" for children, working parents, early care and education professionals, and the community – but, we need to invest the funds up front to realize the gain. We applaud the Governor's recommendation that new funds be allocated to scholarship, and hope that funds will also be included for career ladder programs that include wage ladders.

Similarly, we support the goal of Section 2 to create a statewide Early Childhood Pilot Program, but ask that the criteria for funding pilots include a requirement that an equitable compensation ladder be in place.

We look forward to working with members of this Committee to advance the goal of providing high quality, affordable early care and education to all children in our state, and recruiting and retaining high quality, fairly compensated professionals in this field. Thank you.

